



## Editorial

# Deep Mapping and Spatial Anthropology

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**Abstract:** This paper provides an introduction to the *Humanities* Special Issue on “Deep Mapping”. It sets out the rationale for the collection and explores the broad-ranging nature of perspectives and practices that fall within the “undisciplined” interdisciplinary domain of spatial humanities. Sketching a cross-current of ideas that have begun to coalesce around the concept of “deep mapping”, the paper argues that rather than attempting to outline a set of defining characteristics and “deep” cartographic features, a more instructive approach is to pay closer attention to the multivalent ways deep mapping is performatively put to work. Casting a critical and reflexive gaze over the developing discourse of deep mapping, it is argued that what deep mapping “is” cannot be reduced to the otherwise a-spatial and a-temporal fixity of the “deep map”. In this respect, as an undisciplined survey of this increasing expansive field of study and practice, the paper explores the ways in which deep mapping can engage broader discussion around questions of spatial anthropology.

**Keywords:** deep map; spatial humanities; GIS; psychogeography; site-specific; performance; ethnography; embodiment; non-representational

This Special Issue of *Humanities* on “Deep Mapping” came about as the result of an invitation to solicit and edit a collection of articles that address the state-of-the-art in scholarship on “spatial humanities”; but what *is* spatial humanities, exactly? Like its oft-related mothership descriptor “digital humanities”, spatial humanities is a label which, while having at least more surveyable parameters than its parent territory, similarly finds itself in want of further exposition. Beyond offering what is at best a rather generic sketching of a disciplinary or interdisciplinary field of research in which concerns with “space” and “place” are understood to be in some way prominent, spatial humanities engages and incites curiosity precisely on account of what it does not succeed in detailing with any great precision. It always necessitates a “follow-through” of some description, even if this is merely to make the disciplinary or intellectual provenance that little bit more pronounced.

In much the same way that attempts to formalize a digital humanities discourse prompts the question as to what an “analogue humanities” might conceivably have looked like (a question I suspect no one in the pre-digital age much bothered themselves with), the discursive construction of a *spatial* humanities can be rendered critically (and playfully) askance by asking the question: what would, or does, a “temporal humanities” look like? Again, this a question I am not sure warrants much in the way of serious attention. Other than, perhaps, to imagine a scenario where, precipitated by an incipient “temporal turn” in humanities research, “time” suddenly becomes the rallying trope by which a re-constellation of otherwise diverse and disparate spheres of scholarship is brought into play. An unlikely turn of events, granted. And yet here we are with regard to space and the “spatial”. Space has indeed become a rallying trope, and in this respect we could do a lot worse than look upon spatial humanities in a similarly aggregated fashion: *as a constellation of otherwise diverse and disparate spheres of scholarship*.

Keen to try and reflect the heterogeneity and plurality of research that falls within the (undisciplined) interdisciplinary domain of so-called spatial humanities, my interest was channelled

towards exploring what is an undoubtedly more circumscribed subject area (or “sub-field”, if you will), but one which is no less a product of this same rather loose configuration of spatio-cultural methods and practices. *Deep maps* and *deep mapping* offer particularly rich pickings in this respect in that they highlight the ways in which qualitative and humanistic forays into the representation and practice of space and place are multi-faceted, open-ended and—perhaps more contentiously—irreducible to formal and programmatic design. To flesh out the *doing* of deep mapping necessitates engaging with the same performative dynamics by which its various iterations are made manifest in practice. The concept is at best a convenient label to reach for when necessity demands but which quickly needs ditching the minute it conspires to mould itself into anything that starts to resemble a model or paradigm.

In this regard, it is instructive to look upon deep mapping in similar terms to those that define (and thwart) endeavours to formalize a discourse of “psychogeography”. Which is not to suggest that the concepts are necessarily related (although there are obvious correlations and enticing points of overlap), but that they each represent labels that work best when they succeed in eluding containment or pat definition. Those comfortable with the tag “psychogeographer” would doubtless wince at attempts to shoehorn what it is they “do” into a kind of “how to...” guide: “Psychogeography for Beginners”; “An A-Z of Psychogeography” (“A is for Aragon”, “D is for *dérive*”, “S is for Situationist”), and so on. This instrumental approach to spatial humanities thinking is as problematic when it comes to deep mapping as it is for psychogeography. The elemental and very reasonably put question “what is deep mapping?” is best tackled not by outlining a set of defining characteristics and features (an exercise that is unavoidably weighted by the ballast of disciplinary persuasion) but by surveying the various precincts by which, as a coagulation of approaches and (inter)disciplinary interventions, it is performatively put to work. If, along the way, the sustainability or epistemological coherence of “deep mapping” (or of the “deep map”, its artefactual product) is called into question then that itself may be a worthwhile and productive outcome of these proceedings.

But it equally well may be the case that the scrutiny and attention afforded to deep mapping in this special issue has the effect of providing a fresh set of insights by which otherwise different research practices may be tentatively brought into critical alignment. In this sense, deep mapping may be regarded as a statement of intent insofar as what it is *not* can at least be evinced and a certain familial resemblance correspondingly transacted. What it is not—or at least what it *should* not be—is irreducibly representational if by this we mean a process that is predicated on stemming the flow of spatial and temporal vitality that bleeds into and through the “map” (as a cartographic abstraction). It is on account of this necessarily processual underpinning to deep mapping practices that the very notion of a “deep map” becomes problematic. *PrairyErth*, its writer William Least Heat-Moon tells us, is a “deep map” [1]. But while I have no issue with the suggestion that the book may be the creative outcome of a process of “deep mapping”, I am less sold on the idea that the text itself constitutes a “map”. Although, as coiner of the term, Heat-Moon’s name is routinely rehearsed in discussions of deep mapping as part of a preliminary conceptual backstory, Heat-Moon himself was not, of course, consciously laying the foundation stones for something that others would go on to pick up as “deep mapping”. As a dense, “deeply” layered and richly textured literary survey of Chase County in the US state of Kansas, *PrairyErth* is a deep map of sorts; an entirely fitting metaphorical description of a textual cartography that aspires to yield what a conventional map or guide cannot even come close to conveying. What it is not is a representational device to which we can ascribe a set of formal and reproducible cartographic features that “project” Chase County or which provide a serviceable locative function (beyond that of a rudimentary stitching of narratives—however deep—to place). But, as ever with these things, it does kind of boil down to what is meant and understood by the term “map”.

When we start to think about the ways *PrairyErth* may be considered a deep map there are a number of key touchpoints from which we can extrapolate a broader outline of analysis. As a self-styled “secretary of under-life” ([1], p. 367), Heat-Moon is desirous to dig deeper in his researches: to burrow down from the surface in order to *excavate* that which is hidden or buried beneath

thinly-layered deposits of topsoil or asphalt. Deep mapping in this sense is as much a process of *archaeology* as it is cartography. With this comes an emphasis on *verticality* [2]: the “plumbing of a place’s depth” ([3], p. 5). Horizontality is for the thin mappers ([4], pp. 29–31); those who hold back from peeling off the surface *layer* and who, in the process, thus allow limited space for *time*. The temporal configurations that anchor places in turf that has been synchronically as well as diachronically ploughed are the stuff from which the deep mapper fashions her or his craft. Our role (as readers, viewers, consumers, users) is to take up the invitation to “dive within”, as artist, filmmaker, and transcendental meditator David Lynch might put it [5]. Wydeven writes that Heat-Moon “encourages us to fit ourselves in the creases [of maps]” ([6], p. 134), a nice turn of phrase which neatly captures the materiality and performativity that goes with the act of wayfinding: of exploring and placing oneself within the multi-scalar locative dimensions that are opened up through the *act* of deep mapping.

Another important touchpoint, one that casts a quizzical spotlight on the abstracted notion of a “deep map”, is that deep mapping necessarily entails what Schiavini refers to as “deep travel” [2]. I do not wish to over labour the “deep” terminology here, but what Schiavini rather usefully points to is the performative work that goes into both the production of “deeply” configured spatial knowledge (what it is that the deep mapper “does”) and what is precipitated by way of action performed *in response* to the production of such spatial knowledge. Were someone sufficiently inspired by *PrairyErth* (as the prototypical literary “deep map”) to “dive within” the folds and creases of Chase County then they very well might find themselves tramping across the same geographical terrain that Heat-Moon’s literary excavations have turned over. Deep mapping, in other words, cannot be reduced to the otherwise a-spatial and a-temporal domain of the (deep) *map*. It denotes an anthropology of practice. People are *doing things* when they engage in deep mapping; what it is they are doing becomes the focus of a spatial anthropology: a culture of mapping practice [7].

The important emphasis placed on *performance* is most notably explored by the archaeologists Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, whose book *Theatre/Archaeology* [8] distils (by its title alone) a re-oriented and quintessentially interdisciplinary view of landscape, one that pays heed to “the grain and patina of place . . . the interpenetrations of the historical and the contemporary, the political and the poetic, the factual and the fictional, the discursive and the sensual” ([8], pp. 64–65). For Pearson and Shanks, deep mapping extends to “everything you might ever want to say about a place” ([8], p. 65). Of course, everything you might want to say may be voluminous, polyvocal or open-ended (as any deep mapping worth its salt should be aiming for anyway, almost by default). The loud thud that announced the arrival, by post, of *PrairyErth* on my doormat is testament to the ambition of its author to narratively and exhaustively scour the pocket of Kansas which the book sets out to “map”. Unlike the surface dimensions that delineate and give shape to the locational properties of place, verticality and depth denote a comparative absence of limitations. The deeper you go the more layers you accrue. The problem becomes how to hold it all together: how to “frame” it as a map. The performativity and theatricality of place that might accompany a walker in Heat-Moon’s Chase County, or which might give flavour to his or her practice, is not predicated on their being a material cartographic resource as a necessary reference point when out “in the field” (which is just as well given the book’s size). The “map” is lodged in the more immaterial spaces of the body and imagination. Its performativity is made flesh in the way the walker inhabits and dwells within the space that both map (book) and walker conjure into being.

There is, then, a fundamental *creativity* at work in the practice of deep mapping, both on the part of the mapper and that of the “map reader”. It is cartography as art rather than science (not that there is any neat binary between the two). Given this, it is not all that surprising to discover that, alongside the proponents of a literary deep mapping (chiefly, but by no means exclusively originating from the United States [9]), the most notable traffic of activity conducted under the banner of deep mapping has been initiated by visual and performance artists. Two of its most eloquent champions are Clifford McLucas and Iain Biggs [10–13]. The latter in particular is at pains to stress the interdisciplinarity or post-disciplinarity of deep mapping. For Biggs, one of the defining ingredients of an “open”

deep mapping is the extent to which it is able to avoid “becoming complicit in its ‘disciplining’” ([11], p. 21). This echoes the point made earlier about resisting the formalizing of a language or method of deep mapping that in some way reins it in as an otherwise “knowledgeable, passionate, polyvocal engagement with the world” ([11], p. 8). Cultivating what Biggs refers to as a *metaxy* of practice—a “space in-between” in which to pitch a precarious and purposefully indeterminate sense of a deep mapping practice—is to tread a fine line between complicity and creative dissolution. The creative efficacy of open deep mapping is co-extensive with that which underpins an artistic praxis that is operative outside of the tramlines of disciplinary or institutional orthodoxy. The complicity comes in the form of challenges that are posed in having to dance around a discursive object—deep mapping—whose constitutive “openness” is itself open to the dangers of “disciplining”. In other words, the process of framing an “open” deep mapping runs the risk of a sort of “inverse disciplining” on account of the very fact that it is an object of discourse, even if it is trying its best not to be. The paradox is that Biggs’s call for an “open deep mapping” only makes sense insofar as its openness is sufficiently diffuse as to do away with the very idea of deep mapping in the first place. The challenge of balancing these contradictory facets means questioning the coherence and validity of deep mapping on the one hand and maintaining a loose, plural and open application of the term on the other.

This careful balancing act is what I find myself having to be attentive to as editor of this special issue. “Deep maps” or “deep mapping” are not terms I have found myself using to any great extent in my work to date. Nor do I foresee a scenario where they are likely to imprint themselves more firmly on my thinking and practice. For me, deep mapping, like psychogeography, should be implicit not explicit in its application. As with my earlier observations with regard to “spatial humanities”, deep mapping—resisting attempts to discipline what it is or should be, or mindful of its plurality and “openness” as a discursive frame of reference—might be better looked upon as a constellation of otherwise diverse and disparate spheres of scholarship. This is manifestly borne out in the disciplinary wide-ranging and eclectic nature of the contributions assembled in this special issue. Furthermore, as a gathering of multivalent expressions of deep mapping practice, there is a more formal and interactive rationale underpinning what digital and open-access publications such as this are able to offer the “deep map reader”. That is, there is a more fluid and seamless interplay between the textuality of the writing and that of other media, whether these be photographic or moving images, digital maps, audio sound files, digital (and digitized) art works, locative media, hypertext data, other publications, and so on. Deep mapping, in short, is largely a product of the digital age.

This brings me back to where I came in: deep mapping situated in the wider context of an emerging digital/spatial humanities discourse. For deep mapping to acquire traction and resonance beyond an otherwise vague referencing to humanistic and qualitative approaches to the cartography of place—whether encompassing literary and cinematic geographies [14–17], psychogeography [18], site-specific art [19], popular music geographies and “musicscapes” [20,21], landscape and performance [8,22], spatial history [23], or whatever else we might wish to find room for in the big tent that is spatial humanities scholarship—then the possibilities offered by digital cultures and technologies certainly warrant attention.

The representational constraints attached to the idea of a deep map as something that aspires to be *more-than-representational* [24] are analogous to those that are routinely confronted by ethnographers tasked with the translation of *experience* (the flux and messiness of everyday life) into *narrative* (the ordered and disciplined fieldwork monograph). The fixity and abstraction of the cartographic frame (the map) belie the unboundedly complex, contingent and temporal spatialities of “the field”. The deep map is a utopian imaginary of space inasmuch as it strives to frame or in some way open itself up to that which is “lived”. By contrast, the *thin* map (if we can accept, for a moment, this oppositional conceit) is unapologetically representational: it is a representation of space that is ill- or, at least, under-equipped when it comes to servicing the needs of those whose inclinations are to “dive within”. The writing culture debates that surfaced in anthropology in the 1980s, and which precipitated much hand-wringing in respect of a perceived crisis in ethnographic representation, drew

closer attention to the interpretative mechanics of “thick description” in the writing-up of fieldwork “data”. One of the consequences of this was to raise the question as to whether a sharply-observed and experientially immersive *literary* description of a given socio-cultural landscape could offer up as much if not more than a disciplinary-framed *ethnographic* account. A similar question could be posed in relation to cartography once the epistemological consequences of “depth” have been factored into the equation. If, as an exemplar of a geo-literary thick description, *PrairyErth* can be considered a “deep map” then might we not correspondingly draw the conclusion that a writer (or, indeed, filmmaker, artist, musician, or performer if we extend this to other branches of the arts) could be considered a deep cartographer on literary (or cinematic, artistic, musicological, or performative) terms alone? And, if so, doesn’t this risk spreading what we might think of as the art of mapping just a little bit too thinly? Put another way: does “deep mapping” need to be discursively labelled as such for it to qualify as “deep mapping”? And if the answer is “no”, then might not the cartographic hoops through which one might otherwise be required to jump be dispensed with altogether without any significant detraction in terms of what or how a place is being “mapped”?

These are questions I raise more by way of an introductory gesture than an attempt to render a partisan position as to the sustainability (or redundancy) of “deep mapping” as an object of discourse. There are certainly some common threads that can provisionally be woven together: a concern with narrative and spatial storytelling; a multi-scalar and multi-layered spatial structure; a capacity for thick description; a multimedial navigability; a spatially intertextual hermeneutics; an orientation towards the experiential and embodied; a strongly performative dimension; an embrace of the spatiotemporally contingent; a compliance with ethnographic and auto-ethnographic methods and frameworks; an “undisciplined” interdisciplinary modality; a time-based cartographics; an open and processual spatial sensibility; and, perhaps most telling, a reflexive—yet “aspirational” [25]—sense of the fundamental *unmappability* of the world the “deep map” sets out to map.

When we relate this all to developments in geo-spatial computing and the increasingly migratory domain of geographic information systems (GIS) then the idea of what a deep map might look (or act) like takes on more concrete form. Responding to the challenge to create a *model* of a deep map (already a questionable enterprise when appraised in light of my earlier misgivings) and to “explore how digital tools and interfaces can support ambiguous, subjective, uncertain, imprecise, rich, experiential content alongside the highly structured data at which GIS systems excel”, Ridge et al conjure the notion of a “greedy deep map” ([26], pp. 176, 181). This rather intriguing and suggestive metaphor presents us with an image of a data-rich and data-hungry geospatial resource whose value lies in its capacity to outstrip the ability—and agency—of its human counterparts in terms of a spatial praxis sublimated towards more computational ends (the provision of a *potentiality* of retrievably layered data). To conceive of the deep map as “a space in which a near limitless range and quantity of sources can be included, interrogated, manipulated, archived, analysed, and read” ([26], p. 184) is to imagine what the realization of a deep map is or could be as a big data-driven, totalizing model. The question this raises for those invested in the development of a digital spatial humanities is whether the acquisition of the prized goal of a digitally limitless deep map comes at the cost of jettisoning the more anthropological, embodied and performative spatialities that are bound up with the practice of deep *mapping*.

Although, as geographer David Harvey observes, “maps are typically totalizing, usually two-dimensional, Cartesian, and very undialectical devices” ([27], p. 18), that does not, of course, mean that digital deep maps—or, rather, deep mapping practices that exploit the many possibilities and advantages offered by digital and geospatial technologies—are necessarily cut from the same Cartesian, undialectical cloth. As David Bodenhamer notes ([27], p. 23), at its best GIS-based deep mapping is an “ideal storyboard for humanists”, offering a conceptual, technological, and spatial framework adapted to the need to tell spatial stories that are harvested from “experiential as well as objective space” and which are replete with the “rich contradictions and complexities” that ordinarily, as abstract representations of space [28], maps fall short of conveying.



Yet while the centrifugal pull of the digital world will continue to shape new ways of qualitatively mining the layered and experiential history of places, this should not be at the expense of a deep mapping praxis that is: (a) entirely at ease with the dispensing of programmatic labels (such as “deep mapping praxis”); (b) informed but not slavishly driven by digital tools and geospatial technologies; and (c) capacious enough to accommodate a diverse constituency of voices, actors, stakeholders, communities, and performers whose resonant clamour—the “multitonal chorus” ([9], p. 22) of everyday spatial dialogue—is not muted by the dead hand of corporate instrumentalism (as manifested by an increasingly audit- and impacts-driven culture of academic research). The tramping out of some form of common ground might be one way of approaching the breadth and diversity of the deep mapping on offer in this *Humanities* special issue. Another is to take heed of the broadly anthropological underpinnings that root deep mapping in the performative and processual flux of everyday life.

In their ethnographically-informed case study based in rural North Cornwall, Jane Bailey and Iain Biggs describe a deep mapping process that consists of “observing, listening, walking, conversing, writing and exchanging ... of selecting, reflecting, naming, and generating ... [and] of digitizing, interweaving, offering and inviting” ([29], p. 326). While this full set of verbs will not apply to all variations and permutations of deep mapping practice what they do usefully signpost is the way that very little of what deep mappers are *doing* is in fact oriented towards the production of maps so much as immersing themselves in the warp and weft of a lived and fundamentally intersubjective spatiality. It is from that performative platform—that space—that the creative coalescence of structures, forms, affects, energies, narratives, connections, memories, imaginaries, mythologies, voices, identities, temporalities, images, and textualities starts to provisionally take shape. Whether or not we wish to call what emerges from this process a “map” (or the process itself “mapping”) seems to me less important than the fact that it is taking place at all. In its most quotidian sense, then, deep mapping can be looked upon as an embodied and reflexive immersion in a life that is lived and performed spatially. A cartography of depth. A *diving within*.

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